



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

October 2, 2015

Aaron Burton
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P.O. Box 12008
Riverside, CA 92502-2208

Subject: EPA comments on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the State Route 79 Project, Riverside County, California (CEQ# 20150236)

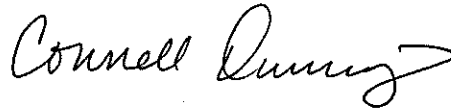
Dear Mr. Burton:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the State Route 79 Project (SR 79), Riverside County, California. Our comments are provided pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) NEPA Implementing Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act. We previously reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the project and provided comments in a March 22, 2013 letter. We rated the DEIS as EC-2, *Environmental Concerns, Insufficient Information* due to impacts to aquatic resources and a need for further assess impacts on cultural resources. This Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) is a limited-scope document that provides additional information on cultural resources, visual impacts, air quality, and noise, as well as updated information on land use and traffic. We are rating the limited scope of actions assessed in this SDEIS as LO, *Lack of Objections* (see attached *Summary of EPA Rating Definitions*). We commend Caltrans for the additional work that has been done to avoid and minimize impacts to cultural resources in consultation with local tribes, and we recommend that any further consultation and resulting avoidance measures be documented in the FEIS.

The development of the SDEIS followed the National Environmental Policy Act and Clean Water Action Section 404 Integration Process for Federal Aid Surface Transportation Projects in California Memorandum of Understanding (NEPA/404 MOU). EPA is a participant in the SR 79 Resource Agency Workgroup which provides an interagency forum for early feedback during development of the project and facilitates the NEPA/404 MOU process. For the next step in the NEPA/404 MOU checkpoint process EPA is available to continue coordination with the Resource Agency Workgroup to complete the conceptual mitigation plan and discuss additional avoidance and minimization measures through further project design refinements.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the SDEIS. We look forward to continued coordination on this project. When the FEIS is released for public review, please send one hard copy and one compact disc to the address above (mail code: ENF 4-2). If you have any questions, please contact Clifton Meek, the lead reviewer for this project, at 415-972-3370 or meek.clifton@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connell Dunning". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Connell Dunning, Transportation Team Supervisor
Environmental Review Section
Enforcement Division

Enclosures:

- Summary of EPA Rating Definitions

Cc via email: Gustavo Quintero, Riverside County Transportation Commission
Brenda Powell-Jones, Caltrans
John Chisholm, Caltrans

SUMMARY OF EPA RATING DEFINITIONS

This rating system was developed as a means to summarize EPA's level of concern with a proposed action. The ratings are a combination of alphabetical categories for evaluation of the environmental impacts of the proposal and numerical categories for evaluation of the adequacy of the EIS.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT OF THE ACTION

"LO" (Lack of Objections)

The EPA review has not identified any potential environmental impacts requiring substantive changes to the proposal. The review may have disclosed opportunities for application of mitigation measures that could be accomplished with no more than minor changes to the proposal.

"EC" (Environmental Concerns)

The EPA review has identified environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment. Corrective measures may require changes to the preferred alternative or application of mitigation measures that can reduce the environmental impact. EPA would like to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EO" (Environmental Objections)

The EPA review has identified significant environmental impacts that must be avoided in order to provide adequate protection for the environment. Corrective measures may require substantial changes to the preferred alternative or consideration of some other project alternative (including the no action alternative or a new alternative). EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts.

"EU" (Environmentally Unsatisfactory)

The EPA review has identified adverse environmental impacts that are of sufficient magnitude that they are unsatisfactory from the standpoint of public health or welfare or environmental quality. EPA intends to work with the lead agency to reduce these impacts. If the potentially unsatisfactory impacts are not corrected at the final EIS stage, this proposal will be recommended for referral to the CEQ.

ADEQUACY OF THE IMPACT STATEMENT

Category 1" (Adequate)

EPA believes the draft EIS adequately sets forth the environmental impact(s) of the preferred alternative and those of the alternatives reasonably available to the project or action. No further analysis or data collection is necessary, but the reviewer may suggest the addition of clarifying language or information.

"Category 2" (Insufficient Information)

The draft EIS does not contain sufficient information for EPA to fully assess environmental impacts that should be avoided in order to fully protect the environment, or the EPA reviewer has identified new reasonably available alternatives that are within the spectrum of alternatives analysed in the draft EIS, which could reduce the environmental impacts of the action. The identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussion should be included in the final EIS.

"Category 3" (Inadequate)

EPA does not believe that the draft EIS adequately assesses potentially significant environmental impacts of the action, or the EPA reviewer has identified new, reasonably available alternatives that are outside of the spectrum of alternatives analysed in the draft EIS, which should be analysed in order to reduce the potentially significant environmental impacts. EPA believes that the identified additional information, data, analyses, or discussions are of such a magnitude that they should have full public review at a draft stage. EPA does not believe that the draft EIS is adequate for the purposes of the NEPA and/or Section 309 review, and thus should be formally revised and made available for public comment in a supplemental or revised draft EIS. On the basis of the potential significant impacts involved, this proposal could be a candidate for referral to the CEQ.

*From EPA Manual 1640, Policy and Procedures for the Review of Federal Actions Impacting the Environment.